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# Soviet plan reported seen in slaying of U.S. major

United Press International

BONN, West Germany — West German intelligence experts believe the Soviet Union may have ordered a U.S. Army officer slain in East Germany as a provocation, the magazine Der Spiegel reported.

In an article in this week's issue about the March 24 death of Maj. Arthur D. Nicholson Jr. near Ludwigslust, East Germany, 100 miles northwest of Berlin, Der Spiegel said the killing could have been planned by Moscow to force an end to the reciprocal system under which Nicholson was patrolling.

Nicholson was a member of the U.S. Military Mission to the Soviet Forces in East Germany, a system

devised after World War II. The system allows Soviet observers to gather information on Western military developments in West Germany and the West to operate intelligence-gathering operations on Warsaw Pact military developments in East Germany.

The magazine said West German intelligence experts believe that the West gets more from the system than the Soviets do and that Moscow is interested in undermining the system.

"West German intelligence experts believe the shooting may have been a deliberate provocation," Der Spiegel said.

The experts pointed to a growing number of violent clashes between Western observers and Eastern bloc security forces in East Germany over the last year.

"They would like to escalate matters so that they can be booted out of West Germany and the allied observers out of East Germany," the West German magazine quoted the experts as saying.

In London, the Sunday Times said Nicholson was on a secret mission to gather information about new Soviet weapons when he was killed.

The Sunday Times report said Nicholson had "hoped to spy on secret new weapons recently supplied to a crack Soviet first-strike force stationed near the West German border." It said a West German source had said Nicholson might have been trying to photograph new guns fitted to Soviet T-80 tanks.

The Soviets maintain that Nicholson was "caught red-handed" photographing Soviet military equipment in a restricted zone, but the Reagan administration insists that the killing was unjustified.

In Washington, the State Department announced that the incident had caused the administration to decide against attending the 40th-anniversary observance of the meeting of the Soviet and American armies during World War II.

The State Department said the United States would not be sending an official military group to take part in the ceremony. "We don't consider it appropriate under the circumstances," spokesman Bernard Kalb said.

Kalb said that the United States remained "deeply concerned" about the shooting and that future U.S. actions would be determined by Soviet conduct in the matter.